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Sustainable development: protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind

Action plan for integrating sustainable development practices into Secretariat-wide operations and facilities management

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In response to paragraph 14 of General Assembly resolution 71/228, the present report provides the requested action plan for the Secretariat, aimed at integrating sustainable development practices into its operations and facilities management. The report summarizes the scope and structure of the plan, the roles and responsibilities of its stakeholders and the sequence of actions and milestones necessary for its implementation.

The proposed action plan involves implementing environmental management systems with the goal, to be achieved as soon as possible, or by 2020, if practicable, of creating a Secretariat that does not, through its operations or facilities management, have a negative impact on the climate.

The General Assembly is requested to take note of the present report and to endorse the Secretary-General's action plan, which incorporates the implementation of environmental management systems in all Secretariat locations.

* A/72/50.

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I. Introduction

1. On 22 June 2012, in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled "The future we want", Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives called upon the United Nations system to improve the management of facilities and operations by taking into account sustainable development practices, building on existing efforts and promoting cost effectiveness, in accordance with legislative frameworks, including financial rules and regulations, while maintaining accountability to Member States.

2. That call was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 66/288 and reiterated in paragraph 15 of its resolution 67/226 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

3. On 22 December 2015, the General Assembly adopted resolution 70/205, in paragraph 14 of which it requested the Secretary-General, as a follow-up to paragraph 96 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to submit an action plan for the Secretariat that would be designed to work within existing procurement rules and policies aimed at integrating sustainable development practices into its operations and facilities management, building on existing efforts and promoting cost-effectiveness, and in accordance with legislative frameworks, including financial rules and regulations, while maintaining accountability to Member States, with the specific goal of creating a United Nations that does not, through its operations or facilities management, have a negative impact on the climate, to be achieved as soon as possible, or by 2020, if practicable.

4. In December 2016, the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/228, paragraph 14 of which repeated the content of paragraph 14 of its resolution 70/205 and included a request that the aforementioned action plan be submitted before the end of the seventy-first session.

II. Sustainable Development Goals and sustainability management

5. On 25 September 2015, the General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 70/1, entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", in which it agreed on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 related targets. In that resolution, the Assembly also made a commitment to making fundamental changes in the way that our societies produce and consume goods and services and stated that Governments, international organizations, the business sector and other non-State actors and individuals must contribute to changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns.

6. On 4 November 2016, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change entered into force. In line with Sustainable Development Goal 13, the parties to the Convention resolved to keep the global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

7. In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 70/205 and 71/228, the United Nations is expected to contribute to those goals by integrating sustainable development considerations into its own management practices. In that context, the United Nations system has specifically committed to improving the environmental

performance of its facilities and operations. To that end, system entities, individually and collectively, have already taken important steps to measure and reduce their environmental footprint. In 2007, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination endorsed a strategy for the system aimed at ensuring that its facilities and operations, including travel, would have no negative impact on the climate. While responsibility for the implementation of this strategy rests with each entity of the Organization, the overall coordination function is carried out by the Environment Management Group, the system-wide coordination body chaired by the United Nations Environment Programme. Additional steps to bolster its efforts and its commitment to sustainability were taken by the system in 2013, with the introduction of the strategic plan for environmental sustainability management in the system. The plan commits all entities to the adoption of a systematic approach to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and their environmental impact. It also identifies, within the environmental management systems, the internationally recognized best practices recommended for United Nations entities to follow.

8. The strategic plan was followed by the approval, in 2015, of a road map for achieving the goal of a United Nations system that does not have a negative impact on the climate, thereby confirming the commitment to integrating environmental sustainability in the planning for facilities and operations and to offsetting all unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions.

9. The Sustainable United Nations facility of the United Nations Environment Programme, together with the Environment Management Group, regularly measures the system's greenhouse gas emissions, examines its waste management practices and publishes that information in an annual report, as part of the Greening the Blue initiative. Sustainable United Nations also helps system entities to reduce the environmental impact of their facilities and operations through the implementation of organization-specific environmental management systems. In 2016, 66 entities reported on their greenhouse gas emissions, which totalled 2 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent for the year. Of those, 32 achieved the goal of having no negative impact on the climate from their facilities and operations, as a result of systematic emissions reduction efforts and the acquisition of carbon credits. In addition, 42 entities reported on their waste management practices.

10. The Secretariat has taken steps to reduce its environmental impact and improve its environmental performance. The capital master plan, which covered the renovation of United Nations buildings in New York, achieved efficiencies in terms of energy consumption and resources used. In addition, in December 2011, a senior-level steering group on environmental sustainability management was established to promote a more systematic approach to the various initiatives undertaken to improve resource efficiency at Headquarters, including the sourcing of renewable electrical energy, the replacement of individual printers with centrally managed shared printers to reduce energy, toner and paper use, the improvement of waste management practices and the launch of an internal communications campaign to raise awareness of environmental issues in the workplace.

11. The above-mentioned steering group has been instrumental in the development of the Secretariat-wide action plan and has initiated the implementation of an environmental management system for Headquarters. To build on existing efforts, the Secretariat-wide action plan is designed and structured as an environmental management system.

III. Achieving the goal through environmental management systems

12. In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 66/288 (para. 96), 67/226 (para. 15), 70/205 (para. 14) and 71/228 (para. 14), the action plan for the Secretariat would, through the implementation of environmental management systems, aim to integrate sustainable development practices into the Secretariat's operations and facilities management and control any negative impact on the climate therefrom. It would build on existing efforts and promote cost-effectiveness while maintaining accountability to Member States. In addition, the action plan would allow the Secretariat to contribute actively to different Sustainable Development Goals and targets, including the goal of taking urgent action to combat climate change and the goal of ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns.[1]

13. An environmental management system uses a structured approach designed to help organizations to manage their environmental impact and improve their environmental performance over time and within a scope defined by the organizations themselves. Such systems are intended to help organizations to determine the environmental impact of their activities, propose planned actions to address those activities, periodically verify their effectiveness and transparently report on them. An environmental management system provides a structure for the integration of environmental considerations into key management areas, such as training, records and data management, inspections and the establishment of objectives and policies. The most important element of such systems is a commitment to continuous improvement.

14. Environmental management systems pursue a standard, phased approach to environmental initiatives. The planning phase involves setting up a specific initiative and setting objectives and targets. The second phase comprises implementation. The third phase encompasses gathering and analysing data and results, and the last phase involves considering whether objectives and targets for further implementation should be revised.

IV. Achieving no negative impact on climate as soon as possible

15. While an initial goal of implementing environmental management systems throughout the Secretariat would be to mitigate any negative impact on the climate, the systems would also take other environmental objectives into account in terms of Secretariat operations and facilities management. This is understood to mean that all entities would undertake efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental impacts as far as possible while meeting their business needs and delivering on their mandates.

16. The Secretariat already tracks its greenhouse gas emissions, using a standard methodology for the entire United Nations system, as described in paragraph 9 above.[2] It is recognized that it would not be realistic to expect any United Nations system entity to completely eliminate greenhouse gas emissions; the Secretariat would therefore look at options to acquire carbon credits to offset unavoidable

[1] The full implementation of an environmental management system by the Secretariat could positively contribute, inter alia, to Sustainable Development Goal targets and indicators 3.9, 4.7, 6.1-6.4, 7.2, 7.3, 9.4, 9.a, 11.2, 11.4, 11.7, 11.b, 12.2-12.8, 13.2, 13.3, 15.1, 15.5, 15.7, 15.8, 17.18 and 17.19.

[2] More detailed information on the methodology used is available from www.greeningtheblue.org/our-approach/measuring-our-impacts.

emissions and would integrate best practices, lessons learned and guidance already developed from the rest of the United Nations system, in line with the Paris Agreement.

V. Scope

17. The Secretariat's action plan would apply to all operations and facilities management procedures, decisions, activities and practices of the Secretariat at Headquarters, offices away from Headquarters, regional commissions and field missions.

VI. Implementation structure and governance

18. The Secretariat operates in countries with a wide variety of infrastructure, risks, markets and cultures, which means that the challenges faced in reducing the environmental and climate impact of its operations vary enormously from location to location.

19. The intention is to revise the terms of reference of the existing senior-level steering group on environmental sustainability management, chaired by the Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services, and to adjust its membership to incorporate Secretariat-wide representation. Such changes would enable the group to provide an overarching coordination mechanism for environmental management systems across the Secretariat. The coordination mechanism would provide a framework for setting policies and priorities and for establishing normalization guidelines, as well as for sharing and leveraging positive experiences and practices in the field of environmental management. It would also improve coordination and internal communications, with the goal of generating continuous improvement in resource use.

20. The central support and guidance provided at the Secretariat level by the steering group on environmental sustainability management would be aligned with the existing system-wide guidance provided by the Environment Management Group so as to maintain a coherent approach to environmental management systems throughout the United Nations system.

21. Under the action plan, a Secretariat-wide environmental policy would be developed and implemented, along with environmental management systems at each geographic location. The Department of Field Support environmental management system would be implemented for field missions, as that system takes into account their particular circumstances and requirements. The approach to reducing the environmental footprint of the United Nations would be harmonized but decentralized, to allow each geographic location of the Secretariat to determine the most relevant environmental impacts resulting from their activities, propose planned actions to address those impacts and periodically verify the effectiveness of the actions taken.

22. Such a systematic approach would help the Secretariat, at all of its locations, to prioritize the management of the most significant risks where they occur and to support the implementation of locally viable measures. Examples of such approaches would include infrastructure enhancements that improve energy efficiency, increased use of renewable energy sources such as solar power, the use of fuel-efficient ground transport and improved water and waste management practices.

23. Each geographic location of the Secretariat, including each special political and peacekeeping mission, would be expected to progressively integrate environmental sustainability practices into its operations and facilities management. The field missions have already started doing so, following the promulgation of the environmental policy for United Nations field missions, adopted in 2009. The General Assembly, in its resolution 70/286 (para. 31), requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to reduce the overall environmental footprint of each peacekeeping mission, including by implementing environmentally friendly waste management and power generation systems, in full compliance with the relevant rules and regulations, including, but not limited to, the United Nations environmental and waste management policy and procedures. The Security Council has also addressed this issue through a number of mandates in recent years.[3]

24. The core objectives of each environmental management system would be to analyse, plan and periodically review the environmental aspects of operations and facilities management, select environmental objectives related to those aspects and implement strategies for achieving them. The system would be integrated into management processes and be designed to respect existing rules and regulations.

25. The vast majority of Secretariat bodies worldwide have already taken specific action to reduce the use of resources as part of modernized and improved management practices,[4] the results of which are in part reported in the annual "Greening the Blue" report. The Secretariat would capitalize on those efforts in facilities and operations and integrate them into the environmental management systems in order to provide a more complete and systematic framework for those sustainability initiatives. In addition, the Secretariat would develop and monitor the implementation of a tangible road map for reaching the goal of a United Nations that does not have a negative impact on the climate by 2020, if practicable. The environmental management systems would be designed to facilitate synergies and joint initiatives for meeting environmental objectives common to two or more geographic locations.

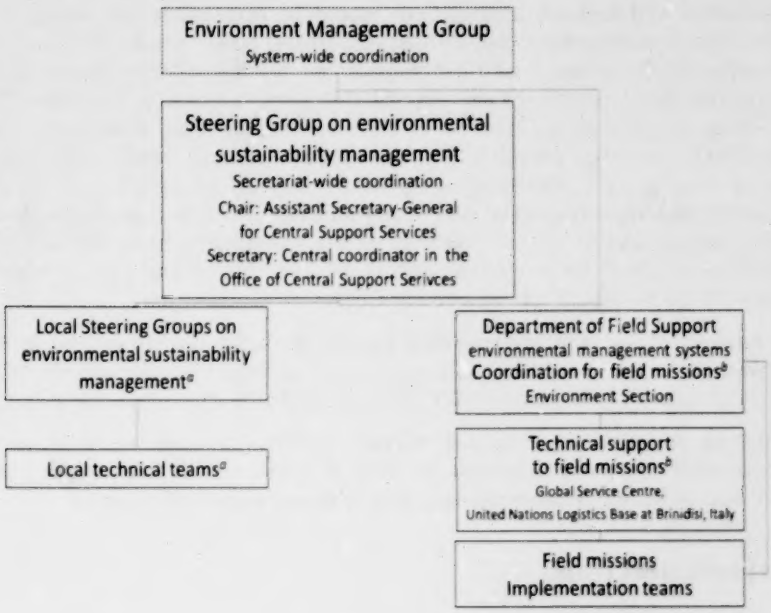
VII. Roles and responsibilities

26. The proposed structure of the environmental management systems in the Secretariat is outlined in the present section and illustrated in the organization chart below.

[3] For the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, see Security Council resolutions 2100 (2013), 2164 (2014), 2227 (2015) and 2295 (2016); for the United Nations Support Office in Somalia, see Security Council resolution 2245 (2015).

[4] Examples of such action, provided by Sustainable United Nations, include: (a) the installation of LED lighting, motion sensors and light wells and the use of shared printers and energy-efficient computers at the new Gigiri compound of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, which have reduced the Office's normalized electricity consumption to 48 kWh/m^2 per year from 100 kWh/m^2 per year in the previous building; (b) extensive renovations at Headquarters and at the United Nations Office at Vienna, which have yielded energy consumption reductions of over 50 per cent; (c) the switch to using electricity from renewable sources at Headquarters and at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, at no additional cost to the Organization; and (d) several measures to decrease electricity use taken at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, including improved insulation, the use of natural light and the optimization of temperatures.

Secretariat environmental management systems


Environment Management Group
System-wide coordination
Steering Group on environmental sustainability management
Secretariat-wide coordination
Chair: Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services
Secretary: Central coordinator in the Office of Central Support Serivces
Local Steering Groups on environmental sustainability management[a]
Local technical teams[a]
Department of Field Support environmental management systems
Coordination for field missions[b]
Environment Section
Technical support to field missions[b]
Global Service Centre, United Nations Logistics Base at Brindisi, Italy
Field missions
Implementation teams

[a] For each geographic location.
[b] For each field mission.

A. Steering group on environmental sustainability management

27. As stated above, the existing senior-level steering group on environmental sustainability management would be expanded to function as the Secretariat-wide coordination mechanism. The Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services would continue as Chair of the steering group and as the project owner of the action plan. Among the first tasks of the group would be to establish a Secretariat-wide environmental policy and guidelines, including on capacity-building, for local groups, drawing on lessons learned and best practices from the environmental management system for field missions, where applicable. On an ongoing basis, the steering group would review the activities and results of the local environmental management systems and revise the overall policy and guidance as appropriate.

28. Processes for the continuous monitoring and improvement of the environmental management systems themselves, and of the overall coordination mechanism, would be an integral part of both the Secretariat-wide and local programmes of work.

B. Local steering groups on environmental sustainability management

29. Separate senior-level steering groups for Headquarters, offices away from Headquarters and regional commissions would be responsible for setting up the environmental management systems at the local level. Field missions would implement the Department of Field Support environmental management system, derived from the Department's environmental strategy launched in November 2016.[5] The set-up process would include overseeing the baseline assessments, initial environmental reviews, consultations with stakeholders and capacity-building. The local steering groups, where relevant, would also prioritize areas of focus for environmental improvement and decide on sustainability objectives that, in the local context, would lead to the achievement of the overall objectives defined by the General Assembly in its resolutions 66/288, 67/226, 70/205 and 71/228, which are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

30. Each local steering group would provide periodic reports on improvement achievements to the coordinating steering group, as would the Department of Field Support on behalf of the field missions, for consolidation at the Secretariat level.

31. Using information from the related reports, as well as from periodic environmental impact assessments at their locations, each local steering group would reassess its environmental management priorities and objectives.

C. Local technical teams

32. Except for the field missions, which would be reporting directly to the Department of Field Support, each environmental management system would operate at the local level through the existing technical team responsible for facilities and operations, under the direction of the local steering group at the relevant geographic location. The technical teams would implement specific activities that would lead to the achievement of the objectives set by the local steering groups, track progress towards those objectives and submit annual progress reports to the local steering groups.

33. In addition to managing environmental initiatives, the technical teams would undertake periodic assessments of the policies, procedures and activities at their respective geographic locations and analyse the related environmental impact, lessons learned and opportunities for improvement and synergies.

D. Central coordinator

34. A central coordinator on environmental sustainability management in the Office of Central Support Services of the Department of Management would serve as the main facilitator and provide secretariat services to both the Secretariat-wide steering group and the Headquarters steering group. The coordinator would liaise with the Environment Management Group for reporting and knowledge-sharing purposes and to ensure that the work carried out across the Secretariat is coherent with United Nations system practices. Specific support for the development of local environmental management systems at offices away from Headquarters and regional commissions and coordination of the planning and execution of, and reporting on, environmental management system projects at Headquarters would be paramount to ensuring the implementation of the proposed action plan. Dedicated capacity for

[5] An executive summary of the strategy, dated April 2017, is available at www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/publications/UNDFS_Environment_Strategy_ExecSum_vF.pdf.

institutionalizing this effort would be required to achieve the goal of a United Nations Secretariat that does not, through its operations or facilities management, have a negative impact on the climate by 2020, if practicable.

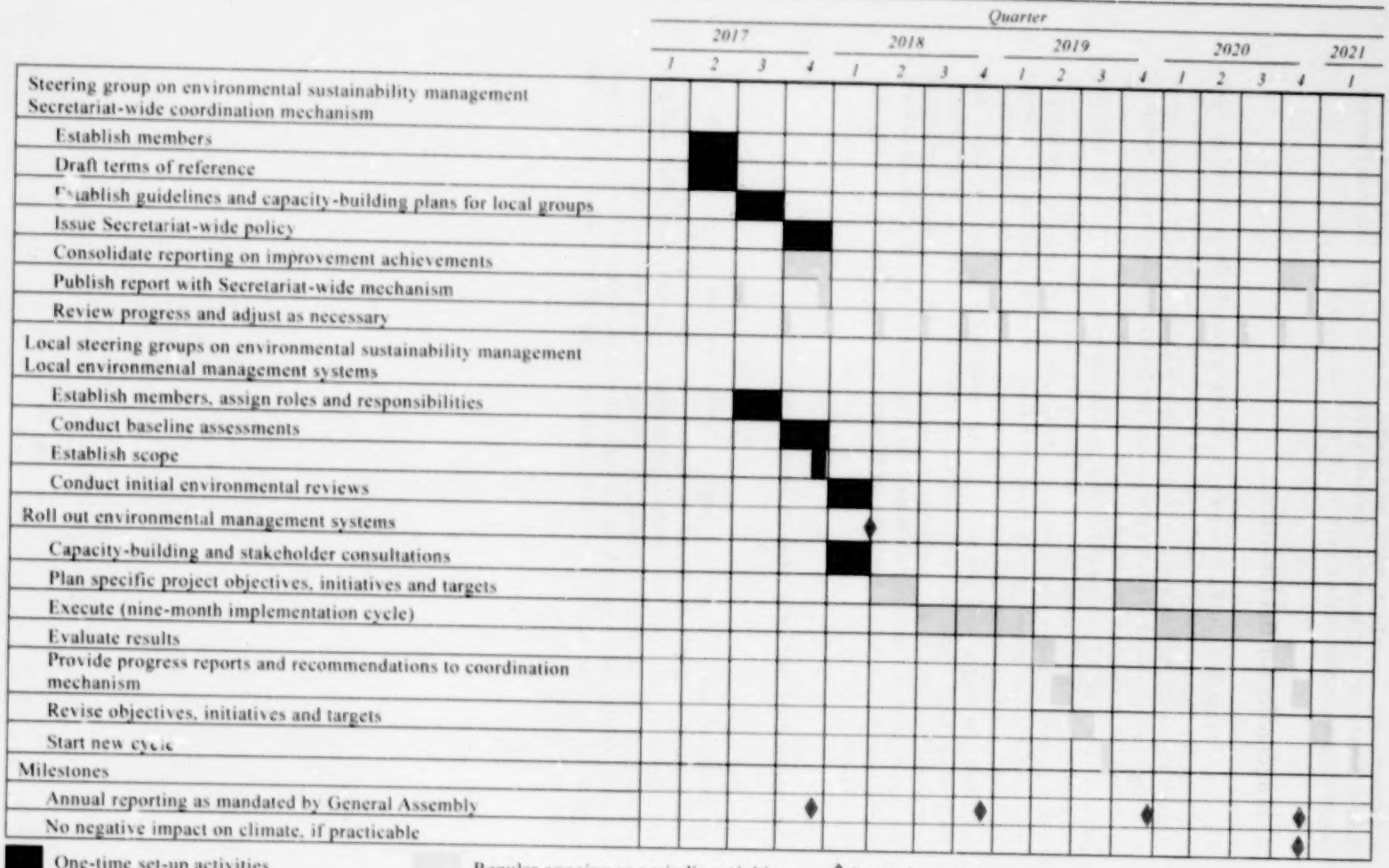
E. Arrangements for field missions

35. On 29 November 2016, in response to the particular challenges faced by field missions, the Department of Field Support launched an environmental vision and strategy to ensure the deployment of responsible missions that achieve maximum efficiency in their use of natural resources and operate at minimum risk to, and thus contribute to a positive impact on, people, societies and ecosystems wherever possible. The strategy sets out a six-year path to achieving that vision by building on existing policies, lessons learned and practices throughout the United Nations system in order to ensure consistently high performance in that regard. The strategy is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals on protecting the planet from degradation and on the sustainable management of natural resources. The strategy identifies challenges and objectives in the main areas of energy, water and wastewater, solid waste, the wider impact of deployments and the environmental management system itself. Since the Secretariat has already been mandated to manage its environmental impact in the field (see para. 23), the Department of Field Support has been regularly reporting on its work on environmental management to the General Assembly.

VIII. Sequence of actions and milestones

36. The table below shows the sequence of actions and major milestones required to establish the central coordination mechanism and local environmental management systems as described above. For illustration purposes, generic environmental initiatives are shown with a nine-month timeline, which includes planning, design and implementation, as well as reporting and evaluation of results and their impact, which could form the basis for possible revisions to objectives and targets for the next cycle. In practice, different initiatives will have timelines of varying lengths.

Schedule of actions and milestones


Quarter
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1
Steering group on environmental sustainability management
Secretariat-wide coordination mechanism
Establish members
Draft terms of reference
Establish guidelines and capacity-building plans for local groups
Issue Secretariat-wide policy
Consolidate reporting on improvement achievements
Publish report with Secretariat-wide mechanism
Review progress and adjust as necessary
Local steering groups on environmental sustainability management
Local environmental management systems
Establish members, assign roles and responsibilities
Conduct baseline assessments
Establish scope
Conduct initial environmental reviews
Roll out environmental management systems
Capacity-building and stakeholder consultations
Plan specific project objectives, initiatives and targets
Execute (nine-month implementation cycle)
Evaluate results
Provide progress reports and recommendations to coordination mechanism
Revise objectives, initiatives and targets
Start new cycle
Milestones
Annual reporting as mandated by General Assembly
No negative impact on climate, if practicable
One-time set-up activities
Regular ongoing or periodic activities
Reporting milestone

IX. Reporting on achievements

37. Following the implementation of environmental management systems at all locations, the Secretary-General would report on the improvements achieved through regular performance and overview reports, as appropriate, and through specific reports that may be mandated by the General Assembly to address the mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the United Nations system. One of the tasks of the Secretariat-level steering group on environmental sustainability management would be to propose a reporting framework to be integrated into current structures.

X. Next steps

38. The Secretariat intends to establish a Secretariat-wide environmental management system, which would be integrated into current management practices by means of a coordination mechanism, including through the establishment of senior-level steering groups and environmental management systems at each of its various geographic locations.

39. On the basis of the work of the Secretariat-wide steering group for environmental sustainability management and the environmental management systems at the various locations, the Secretariat would implement the proposed action plan in order to achieve, as soon as possible, or by 2020, if practicable, the goal of creating a United Nations that does not, through its operations or facilities management, have a negative impact on the climate.

XI. Actions requested of the General Assembly

40. The General Assembly is requested to:

(a) Take note of the present report;

(b) Endorse the Secretary-General's action plan, which incorporates the implementation of environmental management systems into all Secretariat locations.